

Reflections on Methods of Music Teaching

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MUSIC is now a formal academic discipline in India, or almost. While its introduction as a formal subject of study at schools, colleges and universities generated considerable euphoria, it was not based upon much deliberation and planning. With the result that nothing has very much changed in the methods of music teaching. The old system of the teachers rendering certain rāgas and the students trying to copy them still continues at most institutions.

Indeed it is musical enlightenment which is and should be the objective of music teaching at academic institutions. Hence it should be the task of the academicians connected with music teaching at universities, colleges and schools to arouse a sense of creativity and develop perceptual ability among students. Thus, in teaching classical music, a teacher is required to outline the mode of singing/playing which would perfect the art into an integrated and well-balanced form. In achieving this a teacher is required to study the sequential placement of notes and the graceful appeal of their combinations. This entails a certain command over what is most important in our classical music—the art of *improvisation*. I personally think that this should be a special branch of study and teaching in an institutionalized form of music education. The art of improvisation naturally entails the study of the interrelation of notes including the application of Vādī, Samvādī, Anuvādī, etc. Swaras and so on; the entire art of improvisation or Vistāra depends upon the treatment of notes, that is, the fixing of the basic note in a rāga and relating it to the other notes of importance in a systematic way, avoiding repetitions and maintaining a proper balance. In other words, the teaching method should be such as to help a music student consciously work out a graceful contour of rāga-music through musically imaginative exercises.

This also means a systematic study of integration of the movements, such as Sthāyī, Antarā, Sañchārī and Ābhog which together build up a rāga into a comprehensive structure. This is a rather difficult venture as it requires a very developed sense of proportion and balance. Even many of the great Gharānās fail to lay down a

decisive line of demarcation between these movements, which results for example in the intrusion of Antarā into a Sthāyī treatment, the overlooking of the gracefulness of the Sañchārī, and a redundant imposition of the pre-performed Antarā in the name of Ābhog. Such limitations should not be allowed to obfuscate the structure of rāga-music in the academic methodology of teaching. Hence, while taking up the art of improvisation the teaching method is of necessity required to be addressed especially to the following problems—first, to study how to introduce a rāga while beginning a recital; secondly, to study the interrelation of notes in that rāga; thirdly, to study how best one can develop the work of improvisation stage by stage in a disciplined manner; fourthly, to study how to maintain a perfect balance; and finally, to study how best one can integrate the respective movements so as to endow the structure of the rāga with a definite personality. There are of course many other problems that the teaching mode should consider, but the above scheme is apt to provide a student with some knowledge of the basic character of our rāga-music.

In this connection I feel I should assert that in order that a music student can fruitfully grasp the *principles* underlying the task of improvisation in our art-music, the teaching method is to be so designed as to help him analyze our ancient texts on music. This brings us to *musicology*. Here, I think, the higher institutions of music learning like universities and colleges have an important part to play. As our ancient treatises on music deal elaborately with the basic principles and conceptions of Indian music, these should be thoroughly grasped by our music students.

It would be naive to assert that our śāstras bear evidence of certain dead forms only, which have no bearing on present-day music. On the contrary, these provide every source of the musical terms and forms that are very much in use now. It is a pity that none of these treatises have been elaborately edited to reconcile them with present-day music. We have on the other hand printed their texts in a way that is often full of glaring mistakes. Their Tikās or explanatory details themselves are also often inexplicable as they are not usually disentangled by threadbare discussion from the angle of contemporaneous music.

It is well known that the concepts of Śrutis, Grāmas, Murchanās, Alāṅkāras, styles, etc. are well laid down in these texts on music. What however is little known is that these ancient texts describe and discuss thoroughly the art of music in every possible detail; they also show how Indian classical music has developed and grown down the ages. The study of the Jāti-gānas and Grāma-

rāgas are essential to comprehend the later formation of the rāga system of music that has come down to us. The construction of the Jāti- as well as Grāma-rāga songs gives us an idea of how scientifically these were planned and made into close-knit forms. Arrangements of notes according to their importance from the beginning to end together with the appropriate phrases to be applied for embellishment; the compactness of structure; the modes of lyrics; the application of the rhythmic measures; the tempi and the sentiments to be observed—these are all to be found in every conceivable detail in these treatises. There are illustrative songs galore, explained with notations; these can be rendered even today by those who have taken the pains to decipher them. These songs are the source of our present-day music.

The ancient tāla systems have also been discussed quite elaborately in our old music treatises; and these discussions can be grasped easily. All kinds of songs, classical as well as autochthonous, have been mentioned in detail. Being very ancient, some of them may be obscure; but from the Jāti-gāna to the Prabandha songs, nothing appears inexplicable. The latter songs which were prevalent among the people are quite interesting. As an example of these songs, we may refer to the details of the Caryā-gītis enumerated centuries earlier than the period in which these became the headache of many scholars of Bengali literature. Many of these Prabandha songs still exist in scattered forms in different parts of India. I am sure that research projects undertaken with earnestness by the universities will reveal the process of development of our rāga-saṃgīt in its entirety.

It is a pity that most of the texts composed since the medieval period are mere copies of the former works. These also often distort the picture. The depiction of certain forms representing rāgas and Rāginīs happens to be an illustration of such distortion of musical conception. Music is a fleeting art of creation and cannot rest in a single motif, as was sought to be forced into the minds of the musicians. The result was that many performers wanted to create that specific design in their exercises; and these turned out to be puerile and banal. This practice gradually became a tradition; and the old ustāds are still not free from such apotheosis of rāga-music, which is generally shown in our Rāgamālā paintings. It also seems to be true that the later texts have dealt very little with contemporary music; therefore it has been difficult to connect the later musical forms with the previous ones. This is the reason why we cannot precisely reconstruct an authentic account of how Dhrupad, Khayāl, Tappā, Thumri, etc. established themselves in different regions of

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northern, western and eastern India. Persian records give us details of musicians adorning the imperial courts and also mention several forms; but they do not generally endeavour to trace the origin of these forms or discuss their formation, as was done in the older musical texts of India. The only important exception is a treatise named *Rāga-Darpaṇa* which serves to provide us with the story of the development of Dhrupad during the Mughal period. Still the linking of the medieval with the ancient has been somewhat possible for present-day scholars since these works are still there to give them an idea of the musical situation prevailing in olden times.

It is therefore essential that we should concede a very important place to musicology in formal music education at universities and colleges. It would indeed be worth-while to take up texts like *Bṛhaddesī* or *Saṃgīt-Ratnākara* for elaborate teaching, in order to acquaint the students with the techniques and philosophy of Indian music. The former, that is *Bṛhaddesī*, would be best since it serves as the source for all other later books. Details about tāla and Vādyā may be taken up from *Saṃgīt-Ratnākara* for the purpose of teaching. Despite initial difficulties attempts should be made in this respect by the universities to properly edit these treatises.

There are of course many other facets of music for deliberation; but I have raised only a few aspects which are primarily necessary to raise the standard of music education today. There are two ways of training: one is to make parrots out of our music students by asking them to imitate the teachers faithfully; and the other is to instil musical understanding in the students and help develop their perceptual ability. The second should necessarily be the aim of academic studies at the university level; and a scientific methodology of teaching music should be worked out only with this objective in mind. □